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ABSTRACT

Previous research on the personality traits and needs of professional women has found that women in nontraditional roles possess traits that are more characteristic of the male sex role, and that in many instances they are higher on those traits. To determine sex and occupational differences in the self-perceptions of male and female psychologists and lawyers, 65 psychologists (31 males, 34 females) and 71 lawyers (41 males, 30 females) completed Gough's Adjective Check List. Responses were categorized into 24 scales, based on Murray's (1938) need-trait system. An analysis of the results showed no differences based on occupation, nor any significant interactions between sex and occupation. However, women used more favorable adjectives in their self-descriptions than did men. In addition, women viewed themselves as higher in self-confidence, achievement, dominance, autonomy, aggression, and change than did men. Men perceived themselves as higher in abasement and deference needs. Comparisons of individuals in more disparate jobs might have yielded more divergent self-perceptions. (BL)

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The Self-Confident Female and the Deferent Male:

Self-Perceptions of Psychologists and Lawyers

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The Self-Confident Female and the Deferent Male:

Self-Perceptions of Psychologists and Lawyers

The number of women in the labor force has increased dramatically since 1950. Moreover, there has been a significant increase in the proportion of women in many professional, male-dominated occupations (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1977). During the last decade, researchers have focused their attention on identifying the personality traits and needs of these non-traditional women.

Most of the investigations of professional women in the 1970's attempted to identify characteristics of those women working in traditionally male professions, assuming that they possessed stereotypically masculine traits (O'Leary, 1977). These studies have usually compared female professionals with their male colleagues (Helson, 1971) and with non-professional women (Tangri, 1972). Bachtold and Werner (1971), using Cattell's 16 Personality Factor Questionnaire, compared three generations of women psychologists and found that they were more aloof, flexible, adventuresome, inner-directed, confident, radical, and self-sufficient than their non-professional counterparts. A study conducted by O'Leary and Braun (1972) reported that female academicians in male-dominated fields were more dominant, stable, and resourceful than were the men in the same occupational fields.

These findings indicated that women in non-traditional roles possessed traits that were more characteristic of the male sex-role and in many instances were, in fact, higher on those traits. Is this profile that has emerged of the 1970's non-traditional woman generally characteristic of the female professional today? Examination of women in other occupations is essential to determine the generalizability of this profile. Moreover, little research has been conducted in the 1980's, the

second decade of the women's movement, about the self-perceptions of women in professional roles. It may be that to be a professional in the 1970's required that a woman be more aggressive, more independent, etc. than her male counterparts while in the 1980's, as her professionalism became more accepted by the larger society, those traits and needs were less necessary for success.

Two specific professional roles were selected for investigation: the psychology professor and the lawyer. The professions, although male-dominated, are welcoming increasing percentages of women to their ranks (Van Dusen & Sheldon, 1976). Furthermore, lawyers and psychologists are presently collaborating more frequently in the legal system (Benedek & Selzer, 1977). Recognizing the similarities and differences that exist among members of these occupational groups will enhance their working relationship. A previous investigation (Mosatche & Fallo-Mitchell, 1983) revealed numerous instances of cross-professional and intraprofessional stereotyping by members of these occupational groups. The question that emerges is whether these stereotyped views reflect actual differences between professionals in these occupations.

Thus, the purpose of the present study was twofold: 1) to determine self-perceptions of psychologists and lawyers and 2) to determine whether women professionals in the fields of psychology and law are similar in their traits and needs to men in those professions.

Method

Subjects

Participants were 31 male psychologists (mean age = 40.4 years; SD = 9.4), 34 female psychologists (mean age = 34.9 years; SD = 7.8), 41 male lawyers (mean age = 36.5; SD = 9.1), and 30 female lawyers (mean age = 32.2; SD = 5.5). The psychologist sample was comprised of academicians teaching and/or conducting research at various colleges and universities across the United States.

The lawyers were largely corporate attorneys working for law firms in cities throughout the United States.

Questionnaires were distributed to 200 lawyers and psychologists. Of these, 131 were returned completed, a response rate of 65 percent.

Measurement Instrument and Procedure

Self-perceptions of psychologists and lawyers were assessed using the Gough (1952) Adjective Check List (ACL). The ACL is a personality inventory consisting of 300 adjectives used to describe personal characteristics. Although the most recent manual of the ACL (Gough & Heilbrun, 1980) categorizes responses into 37 different scales, the present research utilized an earlier edition of the manual (Gough & Heilbrun, 1965). Thus the following 24 scales and indices based on Murray's (1938) need-trait system were employed: Defensiveness, Number of Favorable Adjectives checked, Number of Unfavorable Adjectives checked, Self-Confidence, Self-Control, Lability (spontaneity and flexibility), Personal Adjustment, Achievement, Dominance, Endurance, Order, Intraception (attempt to understand behavior), Nurturance, Affiliation, Heterosexuality, Exhibition, Autonomy, Aggression, Change, Succorance, Abasement, Deference, Counseling Readiness, and Total Number of Adjectives checked.

All participants were instructed to check those adjectives which best described themselves.

Results

Twenty-four 2 x 2 (sex x occupation) analyses of variance were computed, one for each scale and index of the ACL (Gough & Heilbrun, 1965), to determine sex and occupational differences in self-perception.

No differences based on occupation were found nor were any of the interactions between sex and occupation statistically significant. However,

significant sex differences were found for the following indices and scales: Number of Favorable Adjectives (F (1, 134) = 6.82, $p < .05$), Self-Confidence (F (1, 134) = 43.92, $p < .001$), Achievement (F (1, 134) = 11.06, $p < .001$), Dominance (F (1, 134) = 9.66 $p < .01$), Autonomy (F (1, 134) = 8.73, $p < .01$), Aggression (F (1, 134) = 9.23, $p < .01$), Change (F (1, 134) = 10.22, $p < .01$), Abasement (F (1, 134) = 12.18, $p < .001$) and Deference (F (1, 134) = 10.93, $p < .001$). Specifically, women used more favorable adjectives in their self-descriptions than did men. In addition, women viewed themselves higher in Self-Confidence, Achievement, Dominance, Autonomy, Aggression, and Change than did men. On the other hand, men perceived themselves as higher in Abasement and Deference needs.

Discussion

Although occupational stereotyping is widespread (Malikiosi & Ryckman, 1976; Mosatche & Fallo-Mitchell, 1983), the present study failed to find actual differences in the self-perceptions of lawyers and psychologists. This failure to find personality differences is congruent with the position taken by Saks and Hastie (1978) who noted that there are parallels between the fields of psychology and law. For example, both fields specify the type of facts that can be considered and the manner in which they are presented. Moreover, both are high-prestige occupations held by highly educated individuals. Comparisons between individuals in more disparate jobs (e.g., chemist and social worker) might well have resulted in divergent self-perceptions.

The present research did, however, uncover sex differences. That is, female subjects, regardless of whether they were psychologists or lawyers, perceived themselves significantly more favorably than did male respondents. Moreover, the women scored themselves higher on traditionally masculine traits,

such as aggression and achievement, and lower on traditionally feminine characteristics, such as abasement and deference. It is not clear whether these findings reflect the greater autonomy, achievement, aggression, etc. of women who have chosen to enter the professional fields of psychology and law or whether the results reflect the further development of these characteristics and the dissipation of such traits as deference and abasement with continued professional experience and success. In any event, the findings have important ramifications for the psychology of women in general and specifically for professional and personal interactions between men and women in the 1980's.

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